I walk into my dance studio and begin my usual routine stretched: Lunges, sit-ups, planks, weight lifts. The other girls pile into the room and we quickly review our steps. I tighten my stomach, straighten my back, and smile at myself through the mirror. As melodic flute fills the room and I sway to the rhythm of the music. I feel peace and comfort as I execute my well-rehearsed choreography. I’m transported to another world. When I dance, I forget about the brutal calculus test from that morning or the English essay I have yet to write. My worries fade away and I’m left with only the music.

Dancing allows me to express myself. It allows me to create. It is my passion, my art. When my steps are timed perfectly with the music, I feel perfect harmony. Every time I perform I give part of myself to the audience. I’m sharing my heart and personality with the viewers and every time I do, I fall deeper in love with dancing. Hours of training and learning from my fellow dancers only fuels my passion, as I become more self-assured with my steps. Participating competitions, regardless of whether I win or lose, only makes me stronger, because the next time I aspire to do even better.

When I look at myself now, I no longer see that insecure, mediocre, fear-stricken girl with stage fright. Instead, I see a strong, confident leader who will someday conquer the world. I stepped out of my pusillanimous, self-aware shell to become the extraordinary, determined, and creative young women I see myself today. Instead, I embrace her and confidently strut around the stage with my vibrant costume and heavy eyeliner.

I dance to reach a happy place. I dance to prove to myself that I’m capable of doing so. I dance to inspire. I dance to be a part of something greater than myself, to be a part of a team, a family. I dance to depict a story, to express myself. I dance for the thrill. I am proud to call myself a dancer.